

hostage to political circumstance. In the face of sages of outrage, we come easily to the view that these countries lack civic virtue and moral fiber. I do not want to make an argument for being cynical and worldly. The capacity for outrage is one of the prides of the American character. But along with it comes a risk of selectivity and overreaching. A little self-discipline and a little humility are in order.

swaths of green from Haifa on the coast to the toward the south. Trees climb the hills toward the south. Trees were planted to reclaim the land and anchor the soil, but also to proclaim the Zionist ethic—the importance of the land for a ghetto people who, in Europe, had often been banned from owning any. But this spring, the trees have been burning—

The similarities between Israel and South Africa, they exist. There have been the bombings in Johannesburg and other South African cities. Last week, there were fire bombings in the heart of Tel Aviv—at Dizengoff Center, a popular shopping area. There have been terrorist attacks in the South African countryside. Now the for-

About 750,000 Arabs live within Israel proper. Increasingly, the struggle that began in the territories is radicalizing them. Increasingly, they are being forced to take sides—to choose between a Jewish state in which they are citizens and the cause of their brother Arabs in the West Bank, Gaza and the Palestinian diaspora. It's a wrenching choice, but the fires suggest some of them have already made their decision.

In its most recent pamphlet, the leadership of the Palestinian uprising instructed Arabs to strike at the land. Israel is a strong state, and it will, as it mostly has in the West Bank, manage to cope with this threat. But at what cost? Will it have to emulate South Africa? Will it have to deal with a fifth column within Israel proper? In short, can Israel survive as both a democracy and a Jewish state as long as it retains the West Bank and Gaza? The fires suggest the answer is in doubt.

Amnesty International has issued yet another report condemning Israel—this time for the alleged misuse of tear gas. Earlier, it was critical of the alleged beating of Palestinian detainees. The word "alleged" is a journalistic nicety. These things have been seen on television. Critical reports that once would have shocked have now become commonplace. Israel wanders in a desert of understandable expediency.

Until recently, the Palestinian uprising was a newspaper story in Tel Aviv, a radio bulletin in the Galilee. Aside from reservists and soldiers who were sent to the West Bank and Gaza, most Israelis considered the trouble a world away. "Come down to Tel Aviv," I was told in April by a caller who reached me in Jerusalem. "See the real Israel. There's no trouble here." And, in deed, there wasn't. Forty-five minutes from the West Bank, the cafés were bustling.

Now the smoke of forest fires and the occasional firebomb bring the uprising closer. In the short run, this will probably stiffen attitudes and improve the prospects for a victory by the hard-line Likud bloc in the November election. Maybe this is a good thing. Maybe only Yitzha Shamir can trade land for peace. The opposition Labor Party is all anguish and good intentions—David of psalms but of no slingshot.

Meanwhile, the forests burn. The acreage involved would be nothing in the United States and it's not even extensive by Israeli standard. But forests in Israel consist not only of trees but also of dreams. Like the dream they repress the trees need peace to live.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

## Cuban Fingerprints in Panama

Cuban infiltration of money and arms for Panama strong man Gen. Manuel Noriega may force the Reagan administration to try getting rid of him with direct action, an approach radically different from the failed inducements that have proven so costly to U.S. prestige and credibility.

The White House has not held a single top-level meeting since May 22 on how to break Noriega's stranglehold over his country. Thus, officials say privately, the Reagan administration has ended face-saving efforts to remove him via negotiations.

That suggests President Reagan may be considering less public means to stop the indicted drug dealer's nose-thumbing at Uncle Sam. High officials are silent about what those means might be. But they confide that time is running out on the U.S. recovery of credibility as a great power. National prestige and U.S. influence in Latin America demand getting Noriega and Cuban dirty tricks out of Panama.

Cuban fingerprints are multiplying. Using highly sensitive intelligence only recently received here, administration officials have been able to reconstruct events on the night of April 12 at the Marine perimeter protecting the U.S. tank farm at Howard Air Force Base. The midnight firing, only about five kilometers from the Panama Canal, was briefly reported at the time by the Pentagon as a sporadic "firefight" of unknown origin or intensity.

In fact, that engagement pitted the small Marine detachment against an estimated "special force" of about 50 Cubans, known by their Soviet designation as "spetsnaz."

Defensive flares were inadvertently tripped by the Cubans, giving the Marines fairly accu-

rate lines of fire. Eight Cubans were wounded, one of whom later died. The wounded were taken by their officers under extraordinary secrecy to the Panama City military hospital of the Panama Defense Forces. The PDF, embodying the nation's entire military and political strength, is commanded by and constitutes the power source of Noriega.

Under cover of darkness the following night, all eight Cubans (including the one who died) were spirited out of the hospital under direct supervision of the first secretary of the Cuban Embassy. U.S. officials told us they were placed aboard a Cuban vessel at the Pacific end of the Canal and shipped immediately back to Cuba.

That incident points up dangerous possibilities of Cuban intervention if the U.S. struggle to oust Noriega ever turns into full-scale military combat. It has been completely hushed up, both here and in Panama. Officials in position to know the facts refuse to speculate on whether it was an isolated event or perhaps one of several efforts by Cuban "spetsnaz" to penetrate or at least test U.S. defenses in the Canal Zone. That would provide vital information for any assault trying to overrun the Marines.

Also hushed up is a report that Noriega has approved stationing a secret Cuban transmitting station in the Panama jungles manned by the DGI, the Cuban intelligence service. U.S. officials also say it is incontrovertible that Cuban and Panamanian aircraft, mostly the U.S.-made Boeing 727, make frequent runs between Cuba and Panama; they often carry Soviet or Eastern bloc weapons such as the AK-47 automatic rifle to Noriega's PDF or for prepositioning against the possibility of future conflict.

The current theory that the Reagan administration is unconcerned about these events stems from the absence of public posturing against Noriega since failure of "plea bargaining" to get him out of Panama in return for cancellation of his drug indictment.

The last meeting of the National Security Planning Group on the Panama crisis was chaired by the president in the West Parlor of the White House on Sunday, May 22, before the Moscow summit. No new meeting has been scheduled.

That implies policy making has gone underground, as Reagan himself obliquely suggested it might as that Sunday session ended. Once again Secretary of State George Shultz had been unable to persuade Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci that force was essential to exorcise the Noriega devil. The president's two top advisers had been able to agree only on the passive route of negotiations.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Reagan himself raised this question: What do we do if Noriega won't deal?

Referring to Shultz's long-standing plea for using force against Noriega, one of Reagan's advisers replied: Well, Mr. President, George Shultz had some ideas about what we could do. Yes, said Shultz with heavy sarcasm, but "I thought those were hare-brained schemes."

One month later, policy may now finally be moving the way Shultz always wanted, away from negotiations and toward some form of direct action. Nobody is yet spelling it out, but Cuban meddling is pushing a reluctant Washington that way.

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